

# **Training and Retaining Special Education Teachers: A Collaborative Effort between Universities and the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) Program**

Prepared by

Dr. Patricia Cegelka  
Professor/Chair  
Department of Special Education  
San Diego State University  
San Diego, Ca 92131  
pcegelka@mail.sdsu.edu

Ms. Kathleen A. Malley  
Fulltime BTSA Support Provider  
Oceanside Unified School District  
Oceanside, CA 92054  
kmalley@pacbell.net

Ms. Teri Clark  
Consultant, BTSA Task Force  
California Commission on Teacher Credentialing  
1900 Capitol Ave  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
tclark@ctc.ca.gov

Ms. Janet Canning  
Consultant, Special Education Division  
California Department of Education  
428 J Street, Fifth Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95812  
jcanning@cde.ca.gov

## **Introduction**

Level II of the Education Specialist Credential structure is intended to extend the preparation of new special education teachers through university coursework and an individual induction plan that requires support and assistance from a district support provider. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing Program Standards for Level II Education Specialist credentials mandate that the induction plan must be a collaborative endeavor involving both the university and the district in which a newly credentialed special education teacher is employed. Many well-established Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) programs in California also offer support to first and second year teachers. However, during the past two to three years of initial implementation of Level II credential preparation programs, it has become clear that the structure and requirements for the Level II credential and BTSA programs vary significantly and that BTSA, as currently structured, does not always facilitate the optimal development of new special education teachers.

## **Overview of Level II Credential Requirements**

The new California special education credential structure provides standards-based preparation in a variety of disability areas (e.g., Mild-Moderate Disabilities, Moderate-Severe Disabilities, and Low Incidence) and, for the first time in California, Early Childhood Special Education. Since 1999, teachers are certified to work with a special education student in either a self-contained setting or in a resource capacity, depending on the needs of each child.

Much of the motivation for California's shift to a new credential structure stemmed from concerns about the critical shortage of special education teachers across the state. In an effort to address this shortage, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) mandated that Level I credential programs be designed such that candidates can complete them within a single year. To ensure that the preparation of special educators would be comprehensive, a two-level credential structure was developed. Level I is designed to provide solid initial preparation of special education teachers, with Level II addressing the remaining critical areas of knowledge and skills needed for effective special education services. Level II programs are university-based. Teachers are required to develop an individual induction plan within 120 days of their initial employment as a Level II special education teacher. This plan must be developed in conjunction with both the district and the university and must provide for one year of new teacher support from an experienced, credentialed special educator. A minimum of two years of Level II preparation is required and teachers have up to five years to complete Level II credential courses and to document that they have met their induction plan goals.

## **Overview of Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Programs**

In 1988, California began to develop policies to address the crucial induction period for beginning teachers. An extensive pilot study known as the California New Teacher Project (CNTTP) was initiated to test alternative models for supporting the professional development of first-year and second-year teachers. Based on the outcomes of this pilot study, legislation was passed to establish the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program statewide. Based on the findings from CNTTP, a set of best practices statements for new teacher support was organized into the 13 *BTSA Program Standards* which now guide all BTSA programs. A key

feature of the support component of BTSA is a paid support provider. This experienced teacher receives training that prepares him/her to guide new teachers through the first two years of teaching. Additional support opportunities for new teachers include visits to other classrooms as well as workshops and seminars related to beginning teacher needs. The assessment component of BTSA provides for formative assessment, usually utilizing the *California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers (CFASST)*. This process is guided by a structured series of activities focused on the process of teaching. Grounded in a developmental view of teaching, it recognizes that the complex, demanding profession of teaching is learned over the course of several years of study, consultation, and reflective practice beyond initial credential preparation. *CFASST* is intended to be used by the beginning teacher with the assistance of a support provider. From 1998–2001, *CFASST* was used throughout the majority of BTSA programs as a part of a field review process. Evaluation data was collected from *CFASST* trainers, BTSA directors, support providers, and beginning teachers. This data has been utilized to develop the *CFASST 1.0* formative assessment system beginning with the 2001–2002 school year.

### **Identification of Common Strands and Overlap between the Two Programs**

Despite good intentions at the time the Level II credential standards were developed, there were no “teeth” in the requirement that districts provide mentor support for new teachers. No specific guidelines were developed relative to the format or content of the individual induction plan (IIP) and no provisions were made for paying special education support providers. While in many districts BTSA programs have been available to new teachers in general education for many years, it is only recently that these services have been routinely extended to new special education teachers. However, the BTSA support providers typically have not been credentialed special education teachers, which is a requirement for the one-year Level II special education induction programs. This has resulted in many new special education teachers finding themselves in the unfortunate situation of having to meet two sets of support requirements—one required by the university as a part of the Level II credential program and one required by the district as a part of its BTSA program. In addition, districts increasingly are faced with having new special education teachers from multiple universities, each with its own individual Level II program requirements, induction plans, and program paperwork or forms.

To further complicate the plight of new special education teachers, the BTSA support was designed with the general education student and classroom in mind and has not always been responsive to the unique aspects of special education service delivery. For example, the *CFASST* rubric used to measure “effective” teachings may not reflect the robust research base of effective instructional practices for students with disabilities. This may lead to a teacher being assessed low on practices that are in fact quite stellar given the demands of the special education context in which the teacher is working. In addition, a BTSA program may require that all new teachers attend a prescribed set of workshops and seminars. This can be problematic for new special education teachers who also are enrolled in university courses as a part of their Level II programs. Further, the content of some BTSA workshops and seminars are not always highly relevant to the teaching contexts of beginning special education teachers, but the teachers have been unable to substitute more relevant in-service training sponsored by either the district or another agency. Table I highlights both the commonalties and potential conflicts among key features of BTSA and Level II Education Specialist programs.

**Table I: Comparison of Features of Level II and BTSA Program**

<b>Program Feature</b>	<b>Level II Credential</b>	<b>BTSA</b>
<b>Goal</b>	Completion of required credential standards and new teacher support and assistance to improve teaching practices and increase teacher retention	New teacher support and assistance to improve teaching practices and increase teacher retention
<b>Teachers served</b>	All special education teachers with Level I credentials regardless of prior teaching experience	All first- and second-year credentialed teachers working under their first California credential (including Out-of-State Teachers)
<b>Personnel</b>	University faculty and district support provider (who must hold a special education credential)	District support provider
<b>Support provider pay</b>	No provision made by state for paying support provider	State funds provided for support provider pay
<b>Structure</b>	University-based program requiring both coursework and an IIP	District-based formative assessment process including an IIP
<b>Time requirements</b>	A minimum of two and not more than five years to complete the Level II credential; only one year of support provider assistance required	Two years of BTSA support provider assistance
<b>Research base</b>	Validated teaching practices with special education students	Validated teaching practices with general education students

## **Regional Efforts to Address BTSA-Level II Mismatches**

Across the state, a number of university-district-BTSA partnerships have been addressing these concerns over the past two years. In San Diego County a loosely-formed consortium consisting of five universities, several district BTSA directors and coordinators, district human resources personnel, the Cluster 5 BTSA consultant, and the Special Education Director for the San Diego County Office of Education conducted a pilot study of new special education teachers to help delineate the problems faced by these newly credentialed special education teachers. In response to the study's findings, the consortium has (1) developed a common induction plan format that references CFASST events that coincide with the Level II standards, (2) adopted a common form for assignment of support providers to be used by all five universities, and (3) created an evidence chart identifying good teaching practices appropriate for various special education settings. The Ventura County BTSA Program has developed a draft document that provides narrative interpretations of the elements of the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP)*. These interpretations provide a guide for viewing these standards within the context of serving students with moderate-disabilities. The Riverside, Inyo, Mono, and San Bernardino (RIMS) BTSA program developed a similar document for viewing CSTP standards within the context of serving students with mild-moderate disabilities. It also developed a guide to support new special education teachers in preparing for and conducting IEP meetings, as well as a guide for an additional day of training for BTSA's special education support providers. California State University, Chico (CSU,Chico) and the North State BTSA Program have developed a model that utilizes distinguished teachers-in-residence who are *CFASST*-trained as support providers for some of the Level II special education teachers. CSU, Chico has structured its Level II program so that the initial year may involve only the first year of BTSA. In an effort to integrate and streamline the BTSA experience and the Level II Education Specialist credential program, the BTSA year may be used to meet the requirements towards a three-unit mentoring/induction course for the Level II credential, as well as meet the program's required forty-five hours of nonuniversity activities. It is not until the second year that the new teachers first enroll in the actual university courses required for the Level II credential.

## **Statewide Collaboration**

Last February, the BTSA Task Force (representatives from CCTC and the California Department of Education who guide statewide BTSA efforts) initiated an official, statewide effort that builds on these grassroots efforts. The BTSA Task Force appointed a CFASST for Special Education Advisory Panel, consisting of 30 educators from universities and BTSA programs, as well as Special Education Focus Group members, comprised primarily of special education faculty from various universities. The Advisory Panel worked to design and launch a pilot of *CFASST for Special Education Teachers* which provides adaptations for special education teachers participating in the first year of *CFASST*. Draft versions of *CFASST* event adaptations and the *Special Education Supplemental Guidebook* are designed to help special education support providers adapt the language and practices of the *CFASST* events for special education contexts and practices. An electronic "tool kit" will also assist support providers in identifying supplemental materials and resources relative to special education instruction, classroom management, and legal issues.

Beginning this fall, over 40 BTSA programs, working with approximately 1,000 new special education teachers, are participating in piloting the modified *CFASST* program. Two August workshops helped prepare the

pilot sites to implement and formatively evaluate the *CFASST* adaptations during the 2001–2002 school year. Based on feedback from these pilot sites, the *CFASST for Special Education* materials will be revised and made available for statewide use. In addition, the information developed through this process will become available to general education support providers to assist general education teachers in responding to the needs of the special education students included in their classrooms.

The Special Education Focus Group, supported by the California Department of Education, Special Education Division, as a part of California's State Improvement Grant efforts, has focused on coordinating and extending regional efforts to blend the district-based BTSA and university-based Level II support programs. Informational presentations are planned for a variety of constituent groups. In addition, a formal training is offered on February 1, 2002, at the Hanalei Hotel in San Diego to prepare professors in institutions of higher education and district BTSA programs to work collaboratively in implementing an integrated model of new teacher support. Check the website for detailed information.

### **Summary**

The efforts of the *CFASST for Special Educators* Advisory Panel and the Special Education Focus Group are aimed at improving the quality of new teacher support provided beginning special education teachers. The high turnover of special educators (approximately twice as high as that for general educators) drives the need to examine the system of support (or lack of support) that currently exists. Building on various regional efforts, the statewide pilot programs will focus on the needs of beginning special education teachers and on how the universities that prepare them and the districts that employ them can collaborate to best meet these needs. The proposed modifications in BTSA programs are designed to make BTSA more responsive to Level II credential requirements and to special education teaching contexts. The combined efforts of BTSA, universities, CCTC, and the Special Education Division of the California Department of Education provide a model of interagency collaboration and represent a huge step toward providing meaningful Level II support to new special education teachers.

For more information contact Janet Canning, Consultant, Special Education Division, at <[jcanning@cde.ca.gov](mailto:jcanning@cde.ca.gov)> or 916/327-4217.